



## **Emergency Planning and Management for Equine Operations**

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As the hurricane season gets underway, we are reminded that as horse owners we need to take special precautions to plan and prepare for weather related problems, more so than the average citizen. We need to be prepared for more than just hurricanes, as fire, flooding and other inclement weather all pose potential dangers to human life, horses and personal property.

The first step in emergency planning is to have a plan. Many “natural disasters”, such as hurricanes, give owners plenty of time to plan and evacuate. However, disasters such as fire give owners significantly less time, many times a few hours to prepare and evacuate. If you, your friends and family have a plan and have discussed it before hand, in times of high stress and limited time it will be easier to execute that plan. Therefore, ensure you have an idea of where you want to evacuate, how you will evacuate, and discuss this with pertinent people.

For hurricanes, it is wise to evacuate 48 hours beforehand with your horses. Hurricane routes become congested with traffic, and the high humidity and heat can be detrimental to your animals. Additionally, as high winds pick up as the inclement weather approaches, it can represent a danger if you are trailering your animals. There are many sites within South Carolina that are prepared to receive and house horses. They can be found at the Department of South Carolina Department of Agriculture and Clemson websites:

<http://agriculture.sc.gov/content.aspx?ContentID=702>

<http://www.clemson.edu/LPH/emergencypreparedness.htm>

If planning to evacuate your horses to one of these sites, call ahead to ensure they have stalls for your animals and bring proof of a negative Coggins test. Also plan to bring feed for your animals. Further information can be provided by your local animal control agency or contact your local Clemson extension office.

When planning and preparing for evacuating your animals here are some key tips:

- Ensure your horses can be loaded safely into a trailer
- Know the evacuation route you will take
- Bring identification of your animal (registration papers, photographs, emergency contact information)
- Leave early to avoid traffic and high winds.

Take steps to ensure protection of your personal property. Reinforce your home, barn and other structures with hurricane straps or other protective devices. Fill water troughs and other large containers (trashcans, boats, feed bins) with water that can act as an emergency water source, and may help prevent those items from being moved by high winds. Also, store enough hay and feed for a minimum of 2 weeks in waterproof containers or in a high area to prevent moisture from reaching the feed.

If you cannot evacuate your animals, should you house horses in a barn or other structure? This is a personal decision with no right or wrong answer. If you have a hardened structure, such as a concrete barn or solid pole barn, it may be wise to house your animals inside to limit injury due to flying debris. If you have an older structure, it may be wise to house your animals outside. Buildings that may collapse in inclement weather can be a threat to your animals, and you must evaluate your premises to make this decision. However if you do not evacuate your animals, take these steps to ensure if your animals do get loose from your property. After many hurricanes, when horses get free, the largest challenge is reuniting horses with their owners. Ensure you and your animals have identification. Carry registration papers, photographs, Coggins papers or other identification that proves ownership. For your horses ensure they are marked in a way that identifies them as yours. Tips include:

- Include on a halter (recommend leather, easier to break if horse gets caught) your name, horses name and two telephone numbers that you or family can be reached at
- Weave a waterproof luggage tag in mane/tail
- Spray paint your name and number on the horse's side.

After a disaster hits, when returning to your property check the soundness of yours structures and inspect for any damage. Be extra cautious for any downed power lines and standing water. If you left your animals behind, check them for any injuries. If your animals are missing contact your animal control and local disaster response team. Always remember to take extra caution for your personal safety. If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact your local Clemson extension office, local emergency management authorities, animal care and control agency, state Department of Agriculture office or Clemson University.